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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Syria/Bahrain, Lebanon,
Syria/US, Iraq, Israel (11/22)

1. Summary: Syrian papers reported the visit of the Bahraini FM to Damascus carrying a message from the King of Bahrain to President Asad on Syria's coordination with the International Investigation Commission.

On Lebanon, papers featured President Asad's message to President Lahoud congratulating him on Lebanon's National Day, and reported on the tension in south Lebanon in the wake of clashes between Israeli forces and Hizbollah in the Shebaa Farms.

All papers reported a press conference held at the "Nation Tent" in al-Rawda Square in Damascus by former US Congressman David Duke expressing solidarity with Syria in the face of pressure and threats and criticizing the neo-conservatives support of Israel against Arabs, calling on Americans "to know the reality of Israeli terrorism."

As for Iraq, papers reported that the preliminary meeting of the Iraqi Reconciliation conference in Cairo has called for scheduling the withdrawal of occupation forces, and cited a statement by Iraqi President Talbani rejecting anti-Syria statements by some Iraqi officials.

End of summary.

2. Selected Headlines:

"President Assad receives a letter from King of Bahrain Hamad bin Issa Al-Khalifa on the current situation in the region and bilateral relations, and congratulates President Lahoud on Lebanon's National Day, emphasizing that Syria is keen on fraternal relations between the two countries" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/22)

"Syrian journalists stage a sit-in at the 'Nation Tent' in al-Rawda Square in Damascus protesting pressure and campaigns of deception targeting Syria and its Arab and international civilized role. Former US Congressman David Duke expresses solidarity with Syria in the face of pressure and threats" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/22)

"Former US Congressman David Duke: Every liberal person must support Syria. Americans must know the reality of Israeli terrorism" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/22)

"Officers of Israeli boycott inaugurate their regional conference in Damascus. Conferees discuss means of resisting Israeli infiltration into the region" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/22)

"Lebanese national resistance repels an Israeli aggression, killing and injuring 11 Israeli soldiers, and demolishes two Israeli tanks and two occupation sites" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/22)

"The preliminary meeting of the Iraqi Reconciliation conference calls for scheduling withdrawal of occupation forces. US forces kill 5 Iraqis from the same family in Baquba" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/22)

"Iraqi President Talabani rejects anti-Syria statements by some Iraqi officials" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/22)

"Sharon quits the Likud. The Knesset dissolves itself. The political map turns upside down" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 11/22)

3. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Vicious Goals"

Omar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (11/22): "The converging US and Israeli statements on Syria confirm, without any doubt, that targeting Syria serves the premeditated scheme prepared against Syria even before the Al-Hariri assassination and before UNSC resolution 1559 was issued...."

"What confirms the US-Israeli coordination in this regard is Mofaz' statement yesterday that Israel should work backstage so as not to affect the effectiveness of US moves against Syria. Therefore, the situation that Syria is going through has great benefits for Israel.

"Condaleeza Rice stated a few days ago that there is a chance to make Israel a partner in the US initiative for enhancing democracy and human rights in the Great Middle

East....

"The US Administration does not take into consideration the Arab countries' anger, nor does it care to recognize the credibility of the Syrian position, which is based on UNSC resolutions. The main concern of the US at the moment is to merge its schemes with the Israel project, to blow the trumpet of hostility against Syria and to mobilize others against it.

"Syria hopes that the international community and the UN will not resort to escalation and that they will solve controversial issues on the basis of international law, not according to moods, premeditated positions and cooked-up schemes. Therefore, the Al-Hariri assassination must not be exploited for political issues and to enforce the logic of hegemony....

"The US cannot be an enemy and a referee at the same time. It is not entitled to prejudge Syria...."

"An Inverted Vote"

Ahmad Hamada, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, commented (11/22): "The vote that took place in the Congress on a draft resolution calling for an immediate withdrawal of US forces from Iraq is a new indication that the US Administration persists in its strategy towards Iraq, indifferent to its huge losses and the tremendous destruction it is causing to the Iraqi people....

"What is noticeable is the conformity of US Congressmen with their administration and their support of its policy of occupation.... The high percentage of support for occupation is a dangerous indication that the political mood is still governing the US policy....

"After the vote, President Bush hastened to confirm his policy in Iraq and that he will continue fighting until victory is achieved....

"Bush's war on Iraq was waged under the allegation of Iraqi WMD, but no WMD were found in Iraq. The war was marketed as an effort to save the Iraqi people from dictatorship and to achieve democracy, but democracy has not triumphed. So what victory is President Bush talking about? Is the fight that he will pursue to be directed against an obvious enemy or against the Iraqi people themselves, who are the main losers in this catastrophic war?"

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